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About the Movie Guide Concept:

The concept of the motion picture/movie study guide used here is taken from those developed by The Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) and, more recently in the United States, by Walden Media. The approach is also consistent with the series, Film Clips for Character Education, sponsored by The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (www.filmclipsonline.com). Appalachian State University has pioneered this work in the U.S. and our curricular work with movie guides has been featured in The Middle Ground and The Journal of Media Literacy among other publications.

Using this Guide:

_Holes_ (2003) is an engaging and enjoyable film that has appeal to 8th grade students while also being relevant to several areas of the North Carolina Standard Course of Study and National Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Some subject areas addressed in this guide include Science, Language Arts, and Social Studies. The guide is organized to clearly connect scenes to state standards. For example, the ELA standard CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.3 states that students should “Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.” Through analyzing two short scenes of the movie and writing a letter from the character, Stanley, to his great-great grandfather, the students will be able to recognize how the conversation (dialogue) between Madame Zeroni and Elya Yelnats affected the characters and the outcome of the story. _Holes_ as a movie ties in directly to numerous concepts of growing adolescents, especially in middle grades. According to The Association for Middle Level Education’s paper “This We Believe,” students in the age range 11-14 years old are “increasingly able to think abstractly, not only concretely,” which connects with the movie’s idea of superstition for Language Arts (p. 45). In regards to moral development, they are also “generally idealistic, desiring to make the world a better place” which ties in to the ecological discussion for the Science discipline as well as the racial inequality stigma of Sam’s death as discussed in Social Studies (p. 47).

Viewing films in purposeful, standards-based learning can be especially engaging and critical to adolescent education if effective strategies for teaching learning with film are used. For example, showing short clips or scenes and following students’ viewing with an activity or discussion will increase student engagement and retention. Using the AIME concept created by Gavriel Salomon (1984) and giving students a prompt (cue or clue) to look out for while viewing will further ensure that students actively watch and engage with the film. The term stands for the Amount of Invested Mental Energy or
Effort. Salomon’s work proved that students engage in ‘shallow processing’ or ‘cognitive economy’ if they have not been told what to focus on during the viewing of a scene. When teachers preview a scene or clip ahead of time they are able to provide significant viewing guidance that results in higher student expectations, recall, and comprehension.

*Holes* is an appropriate movie for content analysis based on a range of criteria including, but not limited to: its age-appropriate viewing range for middle school students (rated PG), the focus on flashbacks, dialogue and narrative in regards to the entire plot for Language Arts, instances of segregation history such as Jim Crow laws for Social Studies, and the contrast between the desert setting and its flourishing lakeside community a century prior for Science.

About:

*Holes* (2003), is a film adaptation of the popular children’s novel of the same name written by Louis Sachar. Starring Shia Labeouf as the protagonist Stanley Yelnats, the film covers Stanley’s wrongful arrest for the theft of a famous pair of baseball shoes and his subsequent sentence to Camp Green Lake, a juvenile correctional facility in a Texas desert setting that relies on digging holes as a suitable punishment. While starting his sentence initially as an outcast, Stanley eventually earns the respect of his peers and earns the nickname “Caveman.” In addition to digging, Stanley tries to teach one of his friends, a young boy nicknamed Zero, how to read in exchange for help on his holes.

While the majority of the film centers on Stanley in the present day, flashbacks contribute to developing his character and story, such as the curse brought onto his family by his great-great grandfather who forgot to perform a favor for the fortuneteller Madame Zerone. Another use of flashback includes going back one hundred years to the town of Green Lake, a lush lakeside town in the same location as the modern juvenile center where Sam, an African-American onion seller, falls in love with the local school teacher and is subsequently murdered for kissing her. This murder results in her transformation to Kissing Kate Barlow, a ruthless peddler whose calling card is a kiss for her victims in the now arid town of Green Lake.

These two storylines converge at one point in the story with Barlow’s theft of a famous treasure that is presumably hidden within Camp Green Lake, prompting the Warden (played by Sigourney Weaver) to use her unknowing prisoners to dig the ground to locate it. Zero eventually escapes from the camp, prompting Stanley to chase after him and attempt to find the treasure. By the film’s end, multiple plot points are concluded: the
removal of Madame Zeroni’s curse by Stanley’s rescue of Zero, the discovery of the treasure and its legacy for Stanley’s family, and his exoneration of his charges with Zero’s moral reveal of stealing the shoes.

The movie was released in April of 2003 under the direction of Andrew Davis. While it did not receive any accolades, it did receive critical praise and surpassed its budget of $20 million with a box office revenue of $71,406,000, making it a commercial success. The source material, by comparison, won the 1998 U.S. National Book Award for Young People’s Literature, as well as the 1999 Newbery Medal.

Character Profiles:

**Stanley Yelnats IV:** The fourth generation in a line of males whose last name is their first name spelled backwards, Stanley is the protagonist through the movie and our eyes into Camp Green Lake. At the beginning of the film, he is falsely accused of stealing a pair of famous shoes donated to an orphanage by baseball player Clyde “Sweet Feet” Livingston. Generally kind-hearted and a bit apprehensive, his arrival to Camp Green Lake gradually changes his personality to be more adventurous.

**Stanley Yelnats III:** Stanley’s father and an aspiring inventor looking to find the cure for foot odor. Stricken by bad luck presumably by his great-grandfather, his creations often fail and as a result his family is nearing bankruptcy.

**Zero:** Real name Hector Zeroni, he is one of Stanley’s campmates and the youngest in the group of D Tent. He is mostly reserved and quiet when reacting with his fellow campmates, save for Stanley who he looks to for learning how to read. It is Zero’s actions just prior to the movie’s beginning - stealing the famous shoes - that acts as the catalyst for the plot.

**Warden Walker:** Walker is the female owner and disciplinarian of Camp Green Lake. While using the guise of digging holes as a means of “correcting young boys,” she is in fact searching for the long-lost treasure hidden by the infamous Kissin’ Kate Barlow.

**Kissin’ Kate Barlow:** Shown to the viewer via flashbacks, she was originally the local schoolteacher in the town of Green Lake. She is at first very kindhearted and sweet to
both the children and the adults she teaches, and she becomes smitten with the onion picker Sam. It is Sam’s murder by the town’s racist members that spurs her transformation to the Kissin’ Kate persona that steals and murders as a means of compensation.

English Language Arts (ELA):

Standards
Common Core State Standard for 8th Grade English Language Arts
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.3
Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

Working With Key Scenes
Based off of the children’s novel, the film version of Holes is packed with dialogue between characters that propel the story forward, cause a character’s actions, and even cause conflict. One of the most significant scenes of the entire plot occurs between (18:47-21:24). This particular scene depicts a flashback showing a dialogue between Madame Zeroni, a gypsy woman, and Elya Yelnats, Stanley’s great - great grandfather. The conversation depicted in this scene allows the audience to understand who/what caused Stanley’s (the protagonist) misfortune. After the students view this short scene from the film, we will then show a scene that plays from (14:57 - 16:05) which gives the viewer a brief understanding of the curse and various Yelnats’ misfortunes that Stanley’s great-great grandfather brought upon their family. Throughout the course of these viewings children will be asked to answer key questions and given prompts to ensure their active engagement and participation. Following the showings, an activity will be presented that asks the students to create a letter to or from Stanley to his great-great grandfather in which they will be analyzing the way that Elya’s conversation with Madame Zeroni caused the state and circumstances of the Yelnats family in the present day (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.3).

Teacher Notes:
The following items will be needed for completion of this lesson: a copy of Holes movie (via Netflix pending on its remaining contract time or a physical copy, DVD recommended), laptop cart or computer lab that can be accessed for the lesson activity (typing a letter).

Step-by-Step:
1. Begin with a general (and brief) discussion about dialogue and the power that words can have on people not only in film, but also in everyday life. Allow the students time to discuss and share a time that their dialogue with someone else
caused something to happen. (However, be sure that this discussion stays brief and on topic). During this discussion prompt student to write down examples of this from their own experiences and ideas as well as their classmates on a sticky note.

2. Ask the students to actively watch and listen to the first selected key scene from the movie *Holes*, from (18:47-21:24) giving them the following prompt: Actively watch and listen to the dialogue exchanged between Madame Zeroni and Elya Yelnats. On a sheet of paper, record/summarize at least two quotes from the characters that you believe are significant and should be remembered later when we discuss the Yelnats family misfortunes.

3. Following the viewing, another brief discussion should occur (in pairs selected by the teacher) in which the teacher allows the students to make predictions about the possible implications and outcomes of the conversation between Madame Zeroni and Elya Yelnats.

4. The second movie clip from (14:57 - 16:05) will then be played all the way through and the students will be prompted to consider the following question: How does the dinner table conversation between the Yelnat’s family reflect or relate to the dialogue between Madame Zeroni and Elya Yelnats? How does this dialogue had so many years earlier still affect these characters? (Talk about things such as how Stanley’s misfortune caused him to have to go to Camp Greene Lake when he was actually innocent, how the families inventions don’t work, and how the family struggles financially based on the scene showing their humble apartment.)

5. In the same pairs that were selected for step three, allow the students to come together once again to discuss their answers to the previous question they were prompted to answer (from step 4).

6. Once all discussions have finished, the students will be given a chance to do some creative writing to summarize their learning. The teacher should provide the students with laptops and the following prompt: You each are going to have the chance to write a letter to Elya Yelnats. In your letter you must write from the point of view of one of the living Yelnats family members and you must explain to Elya that you know about the conversation between he and Madame Zeroni and give a few examples of words and phrases that were exchanged in their conversation (dialogue) many years ago that you saw in the first scene. Make sure you tell Elya about how your family has been affected by this conversation/dialogue based on the dinner table conversation we saw in the second scene. (Optional: If you as the teacher choose to add a little more creativity and variation in this activity, you might provide the opportunity for
students to also write the letter from the point of view of Elya Yelnats (or even Zeroni). He/she could tell Stanley about the conversation that was had many years ago and could be apologetic about the misfortune and bad luck that resulted from this.

7. The students will be given the remainder of class and the following class period to construct their letters. The following class period, each student will participate in a peer review where they will read their partner’s (same one from discussions) letter and discuss what they think should change/reconsider. Once the peer editing is complete, the students will be given one last chance to make any edits before printing their letter.

8. The students will present their letters to their classmates during a class period. While listening to fellow students presentations, the students should think of a representative image for each letter that they will then find online and cite. These images can be used during the discussion. A discussion should follow these presentations. Guiding questions that should fleshed out in the discussion include: What ideas/thoughts did you hear in your peer’s letters that you agree with? What ideas/thoughts did you hear in your peer’s letters that you disagreed with? What do these letters reveal about the discussion between Madame Zeroni and Elya Yelnats? From hearing these letters, what connections can be made about how the dialogue between the two affected Stanley? Once the discussion is complete, collect the students’ letters for grading before they leave the classroom (it can be either a completion or numerical grade).

Science:

Standards
North Carolina Essential Standard for 8th Grade Science
**NCES.8.L.3:** Understand how organisms interact with and respond to the biotic and abiotic components of their environment.
- **NCES.8.L.3.1:** Explain how factors such as food, water, shelter, and space affect populations in an ecosystem.
- **NCES.8.L.3.2:** Summarize the relationships among producers, consumers, and decomposers including the positive and negative consequences of such interactions including:
  - Coexistence and cooperation
  - Competition (predator/prey)
  - Parasitism
  - Mutualism
- **NCES.8.L.3.3:** Explain how the flow of energy within food webs is interconnected with the cycling of matter (including water, nitrogen, carbon dioxide, and oxygen).
Working With Key Scenes
While *Holes* is a literary adaptation that uses hints of history to convey conflict in the flashbacks, it has merits for scientific discussion, namely ecology. To address selected science standards, two scenes will be analyzed back-to-back: (Scene 1) The introduction to Camp Green Lake (film time :30 to 1:31) and (Scene 2) the flashback sequence depicting the town of Green Lake prior to the drought (film time 29:10 - 30:45). The purpose of viewing these scenes in particular is to compare and contrast the wildlife, vegetation, and hydrology of the environment. The activity based on this viewing will be a visual “cause and effect” flow chart to depict Green Lake town at its healthiest, a mid-level “in between” depiction, and finally Camp Green Lake during the drought. After the viewing and subsequent activity, students should have a deeper understanding of how the living and non-living aspects of an environment can affect the populations that inhabit it, including relationships between competition and the energy flows that result from such instances (NCES.8.L.3).

Teacher Notes:
The following items will be needed for completion of this lesson: *Holes* movie (via Netflix pending on its remaining contract time or a physical copy, DVD recommended), one sheet of paper for each student to write observations, large craft sheets to be hung on a wall (quantity will depend on the amount of students, see step 6), and markers/colored pencils.

Step-by-Step:
1. Open the floor for a brief (no more than five minute) discussion on ecology, including an overview of what the field is and how it is relevant for today’s concern over environmental issues. Take the opportunity to have students raise hands and discuss their prior conceptions of ecology, such as observations or media-based information. Discussion questions may include:
   - What comes to mind when you hear the word “ecology?” How would you define “ecology” using your own words?
   - What are some natural conditions that affect the ecology of an environment?
   - What are some ways that humans affect the environment?
- Consider the current drought in California, which has been going on for about five years. How do you think the water shortage has affected wildlife, including both the flora and fauna of the area’s ecosystems?

2. Show the first scene of Camp Green Lake starting at :30 into the movie. During the viewing, briefly pause at sporadic scene transitions and have the students write down on a sheet of paper labeled “Holes Participation” (or whatever name you feel is pertinent) what they witness in regards to the environment. This sheet of paper after complete usage in all of the steps will be the “Ticket Out of the Door,” so this should be mentioned.

3. After the first scene viewing, ask for a sample of answers about student observations. Ask the students to answer on the same sheet of paper, “What could be the meaning behind the name Camp Green Lake based on the desert environment?”

*There is a likelihood of some students having already watched the movie or read the source material. Ask for these students not to spoil any plot points that contribute to the real answer.

4. View the second scene for analysis beginning at 29:10 into the movie, as shown in the image below. It is suggested that pauses take place at the appearance of the lake, the appearance of Sam, and the appearance of Trout Walker. This will provide numerous moments for students to write down on the paper their observations of wildlife, water sources, vegetation, and any discernible features of the town related to the environment.

5. Similar to step 3, ask for sample observations but also have students include comparisons and differences between Camp Green Lake and Green Lake town. Use the Key Questions (listed below) to ensure a full class discussion based on the viewing.

6. As a culminating portion of the lesson, students will begin creating the visual cause and effect flow with information that their creations will be hung up either outside the classroom or within. Due to the logistics of the activity (before, middle, and after drought), division of students will be based on three. However, to ensure a greater diversity in visual interpretations, groups will have subgroups who will be assigned which chronological segment to depict.

For example, a class of approximately 27 students will have three distinct flow charts consisting of nine students per group, and of these nine students in each group there will be three students creating the before, three creating the middle, and three creating the after segment, with some deviation on numbers based on the amount of students (18 students would yield two flow charts, 30 students would still yield three projects but additional students would be spread out to other groups). Group selection should be randomized to create a diverse learning environment for each student. Students should be reminded that emphasis of the drawings should be based on the visual/conceptual ideas they

To further cement the discussion on droughts and the ecosystem, the California drought of 2015 can be researched and compared to the movie.
noticed within the scenes and how they would interpret these concepts.

7. Before hanging these for presentation to other classes and visitors, each whole group will present before the entire class to explain their reasoning behind the visuals they selected and what knowledge they took away from the movie scenes and their collaboration.

8. As an added incentive, students can use the information they have obtained during the viewing and apply it to the California drought. An extra credit activity can be offered via researching the drought (such as the effects of the California writing two to three sentences based on the research about California's situation and two to three sentences comparing the movie-based information to the research findings. Point rewards are up to the instructor's discretion.

9. Collect the original sheet of paper for note taking and movie observation as the Ticket Out of the Door for each student at the class’ end.

**Key Questions**

1. What does the movie suggest about the overall state of Camp Green Lake in regards to its atmosphere based on the first viewing?
2. What biotic (living) factors could have contributed to the lack of wildlife?
3. How does water in general play a huge factor in populations?
4. Why do the film staff (directors, writers, producers) include so many differences between Camp Green Lake and Green Lake town?
5. What were your initial reactions to the camp’s setting?
6. What were your initial reactions to the appearance of the town?
7. Compare the wildlife in Camp Green Lake to Green Lake town. What abiotic (nonliving) conditions would allow each to thrive or become extinct?

**Social Studies**

**Standards**

North Carolina Essential Standards for 8th Grade Social Studies

NCES.8.H.2

Understand the ways in which conflict, compromise, and negotiations have shaped North Carolina and the United States.

**Working With Key Scenes**

Given the time period that the flashbacks take place, in the land that will be known as Camp Green Lake during the reconstruction period, the students will analyze two scenes that revolve around the romance of town teacher Katherine Barlow and the Black onion seller Sam. Students view two scenes, one which involves the romance between Katherine and Sam (49:30-50:12), and the other that contains dialogue between Katherine and a drunken man of the town saying how Sam and Katherine share a passionate kiss, which was considered taboo in Green Lake.
hang Sam and the actual death of Sam (50:57-52:42).

By analyzing these two scenes, the students will get an understanding of the restrictions placed on people of color during this time period and how it often wasn't the law but the normal citizens that punished them when they disobeyed the social norms. To help guide the students, the teacher can ask the students questions like: When does it become apparent that the town doesn't approve of Sam, how would you have reacted if you were in Katherine’s position, what can you infer from the manner in which the town decided to kill Sam, etc.

Teacher Notes:
The following items will be needed for completion of this lesson: Holes movie (via Netflix pending on its remaining contract time or a physical copy, DVD recommended), one sheet of paper for students to right their observations and answers for the questions, and some type of projector to display the media created by the students.

The teacher will have to have an understanding of what discrimination is and its place during the reconstruction period and how it has affected modern time. He/she will also need to understand the function/how to use PowerPoint and Voicethread as these will be the recommended media for the students to use in the activity.

Step-by-Step:
1. Before watching the scenes, students will be asked to think of examples of discrimination (of any ethnic group, historical or modern) to ensure they understand what discrimination is. Based on students’ preconceptions or misconceptions, the teacher may need to define discrimination and provide an example. This discussion will be facilitated using the Before Watching Key Questions. Some responses that may be expected from students at this level may revolve around slavery before the civil war, the Reconstruction period after the civil war, the civil rights movement, and more modern examples that they may have heard from the news or those around them.

2. Now the classroom shall watch the two scenes. While the scenes are playing, the students will be told to pay active attention to the dialogue, especially when the topic switches to Sam. During their observations, they will compare the examples of discrimination they find within the film with the examples they made in step one.

3. Next, students will be placed into groups to compare their observations from the first two steps and will discuss what types of discrimination they saw and how the dialogue related to the characters’ situations. Students will engage in a
discussion, which will be facilitated using the **After Watching Key Questions** listed at the bottom. The instructor, to ensure the students are staying on task must monitor the discussion. Strong guiding questions, such as: are the example of discrimination you came up with similar or the same to the ones you noticed in the clips, how did your examples differ from the clip, and how might these similarities and differences be because of time differences, can be employed to keep students on task.

4. After the group discussion, the class will reform and the students will share their answers from their groups with the whole class. Each group is expected to give one answer to the key questions and their participation will be part of their summative assessment for the activity.

5. For the final part of the lesson, the students will get back into their groups and will be told to act out a scene in which they change some dialogue from the clips to take an active stance against discrimination. The students will be given the choice of either PowerPoint or Voicethread to create their media (if the students have another source they wish to use it is up to the teacher to see if it is appropriate for in class use). The students will be given approximately three-five days to complete their activity and at least two in school days (if available to the class schedule) to complete the activity. They will be told to take pictures of scenes in which they reenact a stance against discrimination and they will give their opinion on if people took a stance like this instead of oppressing others, how that may have affected America. On presentation day, they will explain the scenes they have created and the reasoning for why their stance could be effective to fight against discrimination. They will be given ten minutes to present their work. Once everyone has presented, the teacher will digitally collect the work and post it onto either the school website if available, or a class website created by the teacher.

**Before Watching Key Questions**
1. What is oppression and how has it affected America?
2. What are some examples of oppression/discrimination that you can think of in modern times?

**After Watching Key Questions**
3. What was your thoughts/reaction to the treatment of Sam and his relationship to Katherine?
4. Why was such laws/norms were put into place and why were punishments so harsh?
5. How did this affect America’s history of oppression towards people of color.
6. How might you try and erase/get rid of oppression in America?
Additional Resources:

- **Book Drum**
  Here is a wonderful resource for putting the Texas and Latvia settings of *Holes* into context. It covers all of the main places of interest covered in both the movie and source material: [http://www.bookdrum.com/books/holes/97807475444593/setting.html](http://www.bookdrum.com/books/holes/97807475444593/setting.html)

- **Walden Media Educator’s Guide**

- **Film Education**
  Film Education is a non-profit subsidiary of the film industry based in the United Kingdom that provides curricular materials for teachers seeking to integrate film media into their classes. Consider using the activities from their film guide for *Holes* to extend students' learning and develop additional opportunities for active viewing. [http://www.filmeducation.org/pdf/film/Holes.pdf](http://www.filmeducation.org/pdf/film/Holes.pdf)

- **Thurston High School**
  Specifically dedicated to the desert biome, it is recommended that instructors using the science portion of this lesson plan refer to this public school's website as a reference for student questions that may arise during discussion: [http://ths.sps.lane.edu/biomes/desert3/desert3.html](http://ths.sps.lane.edu/biomes/desert3/desert3.html)

- **Basic Planet**
  Here is a rather concise guide to droughts and their consequences for the science discipline: [http://www.basicplanet.com/drought/](http://www.basicplanet.com/drought/)

- **Literary Devices**
  For educators in the Language Arts discipline using the designated section of this guide, it is recommended that the purpose and definition of dialogue be covered in some fashion; therefore, this resource can be used to cover all areas of concern: [http://literarydevices.net/dialogue/](http://literarydevices.net/dialogue/)

- **History**
  Here is a resource that describes America after the end of slavery, all the way the 1960’s and the effect of oppression on African-American’s: [http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/reconstruction](http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/reconstruction)
Voicethread

Here is a link to Voicethread, an available media for student usage, as mentioned in the Social Studies section on Page 11: https://voicethread.com/

References:


[Untitled picture of D Tent campers]. Retrieved from http://image.tmdb.org/t/p/w1280/ltQHMvXdKvSLrdLfJQo0zbUJB1h.jpg

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